THE MOTHERS OF LINCOLN

BY LAURA SPENCER PORTOR

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL STETSON CRAWFORD

A boy of nine is apt to remember very clearly; and this boy remembered especially clearly, perhaps. He was nine when his mother died.

Perhaps most mothers are pretty to their nine-year-old sons, but she really was pretty, very pretty; slight, a little tall, dark haired and with gray eyes. A clever woman, too, for she could even read and write. When she married Tom Lincoln, the neighbors had prophesied—not altogether sunny prophecies. He was a strong man, with a certain rugged goodness about him, but shiftless and easy going, and his education went no further than the ability to write his own name.

Nancy Hanks was an orphan, and Tom Lincoln was learning his trade in her uncle's carpenter shop at Elizabethtown. So it all came about easily enough. There was the usual rough-and-tumble pioneer wedding; and for a wedding journey they went to the little, bare log cabin in Elizabethtown which was to be their home.

It was their home only a short while, however. Those were restless, roving times, and Tom Lincoln a born rover. From Elizabethtown in the second year of their marriage he and his wife and their little daughter moved to Rock Spring Farm, not far away; and this, though he could scarcely remember it, was the boy Abraham's birthplace.

This house, too, they left, when he was a tiny fellow, for another Kentucky farm, where Knob Creek and Rolling Fork come together. Here it was that the boy's memories of his mother began to take shape. There was much to remember, too, much that was strange and contradictory; a life of toil and extreme poverty set in the midst of a beautiful and untried country. There were memories of the winter season, so full of discomfort and suffering, in the little windowless cabin; yet beside these was the clear and lovely picture of his mother reading from one of the two precious volumes she owned—precious as gold in that bookless wilderness—reading to him and his sister, by the firelight, some story, wonderful and strange, of things quite apart from their lives of hardship and difficulty. Or, better still, she would tell tales from her own fancy, or the "really truly" stories, even more dear, of her own childhood—a childhood of better days. For Nancy Hanks looked with shame, it seems, upon their present condition and poverty, even while she found no practical means of relieving them.

There was the occasional attendance at school, with the memory of long, weary miles to be trudged, the memory of the kindly priest who had taught them, and later, the old Baptist minister who instructed them, and taught them to make certain signs and letters that stood for their names. For the boy's mother, perhaps again remembering better days—those days of her own childhood—had insisted that they should not grow up without education.

Indeed, in all his memories his slender, gray-eyed mother held chief place, and even when the memory was gloomy, it was her presence that lightened and softened it.

When he was eight years old his father had talked before the log fire of a country farther west, where land might be had in some wonderful fashion; where they might all go and start life anew, in the old way—as Tom Lincoln was always starting life anew.

After that there was his father's absence, and then, finally, his father's return, with wonderful tales of Indiana, the new country, in which he had chosen a spot for them to live.

Following that were those days of pleasurable excitement when he had helped his mother empty the husks out of the tow-linen bed ticking, and fill the ticking with whatever scant clothing, whatever pots and cooking things, the two precious books, and what other few things could not be dispensed with. Tables and stools must be left behind, and, later, fashioned anew; for there was no wagon in which to carry their stores—only the two borrowed horses, on one of which his mother and his sister might ride; the other a pack horse, he and his father walking beside it, and he sometimes, when he became very tired, allowed to straddle the pack.

All this had held much glory and excitement for an imaginative child of eight, yet beside this bright recollection was a gloomy one, too, in which his mother again figured chiefly. This time the darker recollection, linked to the bright one, consisted of those few moments when his mother had taken him and his sister to say good-by to a little grave not far from the cabin, the grave of their little sister who had died when she was a tiny baby.

But the weather was crisp, clear and sparkling autumn weather; ahead was the fabled country. Even his mother's face grew brighter; and though he could not have named it, there was hope in everything. Such things to see, too, on the almost trackless wilderness way, such matters of interest on every hand, which she saw with eyes as ready as his.

The next year had been one of even more strange happening, and must have been full of vivid memories even to the mind of a child, which usually takes so much for granted.

Camping out in a pole shed—a rude affair, open on one side to all weathers—had meant hardships; yet there had been few icy winds that winter, and in the daytime there was the cabin which his father was building, and a thousand and one other things to interest his fancy. That year, too, he had been allowed to use an ax as best he could, which was, indeed, not at all ill; he had dug roots, too, and caught fish. For the rest, near the cabin there were glades where there were deer licks, and the slender creatures came there often to drink; other game also filled the woods, and there was no lack of food.

Before the cabin was quite finished the Lincolns had had to hurry into it, because some cousins of the mother's were coming to live there also, in the new land, and the pole shed was to be for them until they, too, could build a cabin.

So the days had taken on new pleasure. It was good to have other people about—people who had known them in Kentucky. His mother's face grew brighter again—less sad. It was true she had never been too tired to give him her care and loving interest, but now it seemed sometimes that she was hardly tired at all; and again that sunny presence which every child loves, yet which no child knows how to name, came to make the days a delight. There was a spirit of hope in everything.

Yet even that memory, too, was overshadowed by a fearful and gloomy one. The sunny time had not continued long when his mother's cousins both fell ill of a low fever, and died, his mother caring for them until the last. And then, a few days later, she, too, had fallen ill, and in a few days more she, too, had died.

So in this most vivid of all his memories it was again she who was its central figure. Then, too, he had been brought face to face with death's realities as few children ever are. None of its awfulness was hidden from him. His childish hands helped make the rude, narrow, last cabin for her, and helped to bury her.

After this it must have been that his mind turned from such unbelievable realities to the better hopes offered in answer to his questions. It was not she whom they had buried there in the wood by the deer run. She walked, instead, somewhere up yonder where the stars were. There she was never tired; there she was never cold; there, in the newer, better country to which she had bravely gone, and to which they in time would follow, the land flowed with milk and honey. From there she would watch over him and his sister. And there were always angels with her, and like them, she wore a sort of crown. It was not a place of rude dwellings—in her Father's house were many mansions—so he must not be sorry that she was gone, this angel mother of his. Yet he was sorry, and that with good cause.

From then on the days must have taken on such gloom and hardship as few children, even pioneer children, in those old pioneer days, were called on to bear. There were neither comforts nor consolation. The frail, gray-eyed woman who had worked so tirelessly to meet the needs of these, her children, slept tirelessly now, and with heedless, idle hands, while their needs became greater and their world took on more and more gloom.

It is no wonder that the boy's thought of his mother at this time became somewhat morbid. He had, without doubt, witnessed the funeral of his baby sister back in Kentucky. There had been prayers and a sermon and the neighbors all about to hear, but Nancy Hanks had been buried without benefit of clergy, or even as much as a few prayers. She, too, who had known better days! All this must have impressed so keen and imaginative a child, and we find him wishing persistently for his mother to have the rites of a funeral sermon. He could write and his father could not, so, with his father's approval, no doubt, the boy at last wrote a letter to a traveling minister back in Kentucky, who some months later came the one hundred miles and preached the tardy funeral sermon.

Up to his ninth year these had been the vivid incidents of the boy's life. Remembering them, and his strangely brooding nature, it is not difficult to follow the almost certain trend of his thought. His childish memories of his mother must have taken on an especial keenness, his childish thoughts of her must have been singularly vivid and leading; just what thoughts it would be difficult to say—we can at best imagine.

Yet we are reasonably sure in supposing that this child's thoughts must have been more than ordinarily vivid, reasonably sure that she was a shadowy and powerful personality forever leading him, influencing him, molding him. It was no mere melancholy memory, but an active, if melancholy, force which, in her name, led him in paths apart from his people. She had told him often, it seems, that he had as good Virginia blood in his veins as Washington; that he must learn to read and write; that he must study and make something of himself; that he must some day be a great man.

Beside these brighter memories of her pride and ambition, the memory of the hardship she had endured, the care she had lacked, and the miserable death she had died, all contrived to make of her a figure of singular pathos and of sensitive singularity which never lost its power over the boy's mind.

Before a year had gone by his father left him and his sister for a short absence in Kentucky. Then one day a wholly new vista opened up. Tom Lincoln returned, and with him the woman who was now to be their second mother to Nancy Hanks' children. She was young and womanly, and full of a kind of dependable cheer. She had children of her own; and with her she brought such things as were to make the days in the cabin in the Indiana wilderness wholly different and new. There were clothes and articles of bedding; cooking pots and pans; a kettle for soap; a flax wheel; pillows; knives and forks; pewter dishes; a chest of drawers, and many other things. But more wonderful and transforming than all were her simple, direct warmth of heart and her cheery, quiet understanding. She was strong and gentle and kind. She loved children and understood them; especially she loved and understood these little waifs in their worn deerskins and rags; and, more especially, even from the first she loved and understood the melancholy, earnest lad.

She was a woman not without dreams, too; but, above all, she was a woman of a deep and cheery practicality. The first thing to be done was to provide bodily comforts for the little motherless children—better clothes, and food, and warmth, and cleanliness.

The boy, it seems, had before this climbed each night, by means of pegs stuck in the log chinks, to the tiny loft over the cabin, to sleep on a heap of dry leaves. There, when heavy storms came, the rain dripped in on him; it even often dripped to the earth floor of the room below, making the cabin muddy and the desolation more complete. All this, at her kind hands, was to be changed. Now he might sleep on a bed and have sufficient bedding to keep him warm; now a floor was to be laid; now the chinks in the cabin were to be stopped up; now a door was to be hung in the one doorway, to shut out the cold; a window was to be cut, and strong paper greased and fitted into it to let in the light.

Action, patience and a determined cheerful grappling with even the most discouraging facts—these Sarah Bush, the new mother, brought with her. Under their influence not only did the boy's life take on new comforts, but his very nature began to develop along other and different lines. There were still the melancholy, brooding and dreaming hours, of course; but there were hours, too, of happy work, with its cheerful results; there were hours of wholesome companionship with a warm, understanding woman.

Tom Lincoln's second wife must have heard a good deal of that other, whom the lad chose then and always

[CONCLUDED ON PAGE 64]

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THE MOTHERS OF LINCOLN

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after to speak of as his "angel mother." It was probably very early in their friendship that she had learned from the boy of the ambitions that Nancy Hanks had planted in him.

From then on her work was clear to her, and her mission, if she ever gave it so serious a name, was defined. Whatever courage was in him, she fostered; whatever wish he had to overcome circumstances and difficulty, she encouraged; his desire to make something of himself, she strengthened by her own conviction and assertion that he would some day be a great man; his craving for books and learning, her own hands and ready understanding saw satisfied.

If Nancy Hanks had given him, along with the brooding, melancholy qualities of his nature, a kind of melancholy dream of greatness—melancholy because so improbably far removed from the miserable circumstances of his life—Sarah Bush, with her capable hands, her far-seeing mind, opened up the way to that greatness. Of course, it could not be done all at once; but patiently, day by day, his life was strengthened by her cheerful, untiring effort, her sturdy resolution, which put aside every discouragement, and was brightened by her own happy self-forgetfulness.

If his "angel mother" left him a legacy of dreams, his other mother brought him the riches of tangible reality. The old memories remained always vivid and tragic with him, nevertheless the new days were full of new hopes. She was not book wise, this woman, but she was mother wise. She soon knew what made him the happiest.

Often she sat spinning while he read to her as he lay stretched on the floor in the firelight; and it was his pleasure more than the book which interested her. She had, we are told, the gift of being encouraging, and never discouraging, those about her. From her the growing boy learned honor, courage and ready sympathy; from her he learned to surmount difficulties cheerfully, to think kindly, to act justly, to endure patiently and hide his time.

For eleven years his life was as sunny and cheerful as she, at least, could make it. When her mission was ended, and he went into the world at last to begin that storable future of greatness and goodness, it would be difficult to say, fairly, whose son he most was.

It has been said often that there were two Abraham Lincolns—one psychic, brooding, abstracted, dreaming no one knew what dreams, lost, often, in an overpowering melancholy; the other forceful, active, deliberate, masterful, cheerful in the face of the most overwhelming difficulties, patient under the most galling experiences. Nor does this seem strange to those who follow closely the story of his childhood and boyhood.

In all those melancholy and tragic moments of his later life, which gave it such mysterious and deep-rooted force, one can seem to see traced the influence of the frail pioneer woman, Nancy Hanks, with her sensitiveness, her suffering and her melancholy history. In all those qualities—cheerful, forceful, capable and practical, sympathetic, just and self-forgetful—which helped make him so great a man and a nation's leader, the other woman seems most to possess him.

So, though he was the son of only one, two women contributed to be his mother. So, in turning from the greatness of the man to search the reasons of that greatness, we cannot be content to think alone of the influence of the one woman or the other; and so it is, at the last, we shall always find ourselves speaking not of the mother, but of the mothers of Abraham Lincoln.

FOR THE WEEK-END VISIT

IF you are one of those fortunate beings who are much invited for "two-day" and "week-end" visits you will like to know the latest ideas in practical yet dainty accessories for traveling.

A packing case for lingerie blouses, that is particularly suitable for carrying in the suit case, is easily wrought of dimity or lawn left from your own summer gown, if you choose. The center is measured, on a piece of goods, say nearly two yards long, and each end is folded back to meet at this line, the edges and ends being feather stitched or bound with ribbon. This makes two pockets. Ribbons are attached, which, the garment slipped in place, tie snugly, and travel becomes much less liable to soil and crush the choice bit of clothing.

There are all sorts of schemes for carrying rubbers when traveling, but here is a practical suggestion a little away from ordinary lines. Select some soft material, perhaps a colored linen of a not too delicate shade. Cut two cardboard circles, three and three fourths inches in diameter, and cover both sides of each with the linen. Take a straight piece of the linen, eighteen by thirteen and one half inches, hem the long sides and sew each of the narrow ends straight around a circle. The rubbers slip in the opening, and the case is compact enough to take up the smallest possible space. A monogram embroidered on one side of the linen circles before putting it on the cardboard will add very much to the beauty of the case.

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